

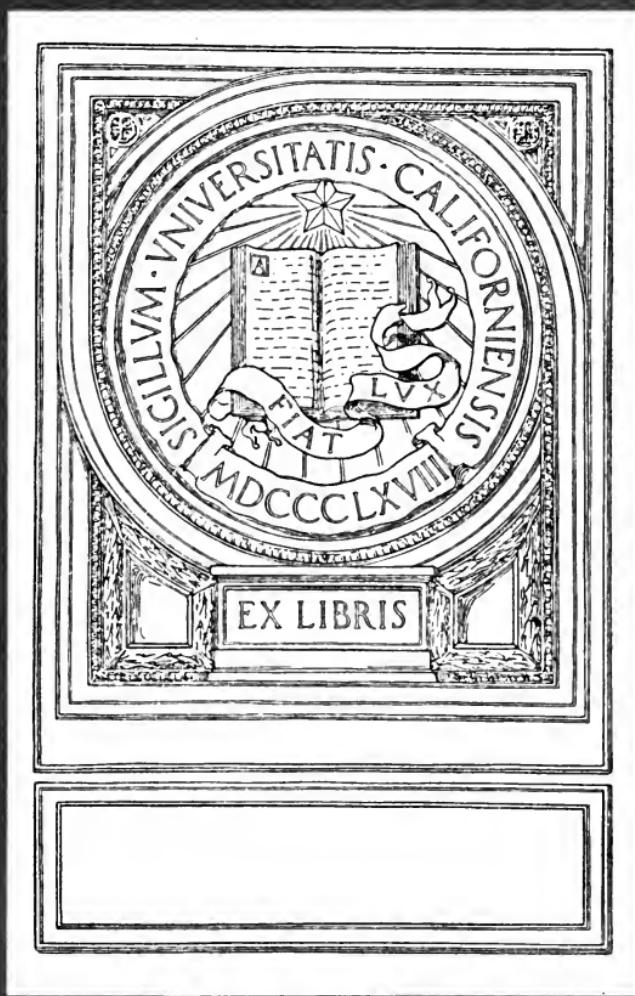
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John Eastman Grubbe.



A

LETTER

TO A

COUNTRY CLERGYMAN

ON HIS

“SERIOUS APPEAL TO THE BIBLE,”

FROM A

RESIDENT MEMBER OF THE UNIVERSITY.

OXFORD,

PRINTED BY W. BAXTER.

1829.

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DEAR SIR,

I HAVE received through your printer a copy of your "Serious Appeal to the Bible," and thank you for this proof of your remembrance of me; but I lament, with other friends of yours, a publication, which we conceive to be of the most injurious tendency. I have even felt it to be a duty to endeavour to counteract the impression it is designed to make; but I trust that my Reply will not offend you, for I am persuaded that you have written with the best intention; and you invite discussion, "one reason of the publication of your thoughts being the hope that it may lead some one to assist you in eliciting the truth if your conclusions are erroneous."

You announce to the people of England, that the Legislature is about to plunge them into the guilt of a great *national sin*, and that it is certainly to be expected, that if they *consent* to the Roman Catholic Relief Bill, God will withdraw his favour, and visit them with heavy judgments; and you appeal to the Bible in proof of this declaration. A noble opponent of Emancipation is pleased to warn us against the "legal establishment

of superstition and idolatry ;" and even the more moderate of your party seem to take it for granted, that while they are actuated only by a pure and disinterested attachment to Protestantism, those who differ from them in opinion are sacrificing Christian principle to worldly expediency. Yet among them I know of several, and I believe there are many more, who are not influenced by terror or personal interest, and do not conceal an indifference or hatred of religion under the specious name of liberality. They have no object at heart but the good of their country, and the honour of their religion ; and they endeavour to evince the orthodoxy of their faith by shewing that it brings forth the fruits of the Spirit, and to prove their confidence in the excellence of their Church by trusting its defence, under God's providence, not to Acts of Parliament, but to the conformity of its doctrines with Scripture. In this crisis of religious excitation they have daily experience that they have taken the unpopular side, and have the mortification of being set down by the great majority of their neighbours as secret abettors of Popery. This imputation they might be content to bear from the ignorant and unthinking, for these we hardly expect should understand that we can do justice, or shew mercy, to those whose religion we condemn ; but when the charge is repeated by men

of education, when Members of Parliament and “Country Clergymen” assert that we are betraying the Protestant cause, our silence may be construed into an acknowledgment of guilt. As one of this party, therefore, I enter my protest against so uncharitable and so unjust a conclusion; and while I give the Anti-Catholic full credit for zeal and sincerity, I claim from him equal candour, and expect that he should not question our attachment to Protestantism, because we cannot discover in the Bible a single text that favours intolerance, or authorizes our supporting religion by legal disabilities. My object in addressing you is to shew, that a Christian may from Christian motives favour the emancipation of Roman Catholics; yet I am not without hope, that on calmly reviewing the subject, you may yourself discover, that we who are abused for want of religion, have taken the really religious side of the question; for it is clear that you have some misgiving as to the correctness of your *present* views, or you would have no need “to comfort your doubting mind with the reflection, that though the mode of inference be faulty, the truths from which you infer are certainties; and you consider it as your bounden duty to pray to God” (not, I observe, to keep you in your present course, but) “to teach you what course you ought to pursue.”

All believers in the providence and moral attributes of the Deity must acknowledge, that his will, whenever it can be ascertained, ought to determine our conduct ; and I as a Christian agree with you, that we ought “ to take the Bible for our guide, and to look to that for instruction in public as well as in private affairs ;” but with this reservation, that it is not the letter but the spirit of the inspired volume that is to guide us. The spirit of the Bible cannot mislead us, but it is possible to mistake that spirit, if we do not consider the circumstances under which the several books that compose it were written, and the purposes they were designed to answer ; for though its moral precepts are “ worthy of all acceptation,” it contains other instructions fit to be communicated at the time, but which it was not intended that Christians should follow. This position indeed has never been altogether denied, from the time that Peter was admonished in a vision to call nothing common or unclean that God had cleansed. We all agree to contrast the liberty of the Gospel with the bondage of the Law, and yet there are few that are not willing in some particular to go back to the beggarly elements of the latter. The Christian world has with one voice abandoned the whole of the Mosaic ritual, rightly judging, that when the one great oblation for sin had been offered, the

legal sacrifices that prefigured it were to cease; and no Christian nation has ever proposed to reestablish the Mosaic polity, which was revealed for a special purpose which has been long since fulfilled.

But notwithstanding, the notion long prevailed, that setting aside such laws as were obviously obsolete, the code of the Israelites was to be the political guide of Christians; and there is scarcely a book of Statutes in modern Europe which will not afford ample evidence of the accuracy of this assertion. Our own usury law is a striking example. The taking of interest is now universally allowed to have been forbidden by Moses on political grounds, and the most scrupulous Christian of our days has no doubt of the innocence of the practice; yet the canon law condemns it as a sin, and even liberal casuists of a former age regard it as of a questionable character. It is also from the Old Testament misunderstood that those who maintain it to be the duty of the State to punish heresy derive their arguments and their example. They argue, that as the law of Moses condemns idolaters to death, the Christian ought not to be more indulgent to the infidel and the blasphemer. We all now allow that there is here a misconception in not perceiving the different nature of modern governments and the Jewish constitution, which was a theocracy,

that is, a state in which the Deity was the king, and in which consequently the worshipper of other gods was guilty of high treason, and amenable to punishment in this world as well as the next. To all of us this is plain, yet wise and good men of former ages unhappily did not make this discovery; and the reasonings of many about this very Roman Catholic question now, prove, that they have not followed out this truth into all its legitimate consequences. "My kingdom," said our blessed Lord to Pilate, "is not of this world;" and he himself immediately draws the important conclusion, that if it were his servants would fight in its defence. "The kingdom of *Christ*, to be extended to all mankind, was not like to the kingdom of *God*, which was limited to the natural descendants of Abraham. The religion of the Jews was incorporated with the State, and therefore was of this world as well in the exercise of it as in the rewards and punishments whereby it was administered; but the very reason which made it proper that it should be united by divine appointment to the State, made it fit that Christianity should be left free and independent. The union of the Jewish Church and State was by mutual conversion into one another and perfect incorporation; but for what end," observes Warburton, "was Christianity left free, if not that it might adapt itself to the various

kinds of civil polity by a suitable union and alliance." Some regard it as the duty of a Christian government to establish the Church, and others condemn the Church for accepting an establishment as a surrender of its independence ; but it is clear, that it can exist and flourish too without an union, and that the Mosaic law cannot teach *us* our civil or political relations either as citizens or churchmen. In the Holy Land idolatry was treason and a capital offence ; the only inferences therefore that we can draw from the Bible to direct us in our behaviour to persons of a different religion must be from the conduct of pious Israelites, who resided in foreign countries, or lived before the giving of the Law.

The cases of Joseph and Daniel, of Nehemiah and Mordecai, shew, that such could hold high offices and administer affairs in unbelieving kingdoms, without forfeiting the favour of God ; yet the two former, who seem to have filled the office of prime minister, must have deliberated in council with persons whose religious rites they regarded as an abomination. Our Lord did not concur in opinion with his countrymen, who condemned those Jews that collected the taxes of the idolatrous Romans ; and by his decision respecting the tribute money, he recognized the authority in temporal matters of a heathen sovereign. St.

Peter and St. Paul both enforce the duties of subjects ; and the latter declares, that the constituted authorities, though they were then heathen, were ordained of God. He affirms, that by divine right they levy taxes and inflict capital punishment ; and it is notorious, that he had himself neither as Jew or Christian any scruple to avail himself of the privileges of a Roman citizen, though it brought him into a closer union than he need have been in with an unbelieving government. It appears that the Christian on his admission into the Church neither renounced his allegiance, nor any peculiar privileges he might enjoy. Sergius Paulus, we conjecture, did not give up his government, nor Cornelius his profession ; for as soon as we have history to guide us, we find Christians serving in the imperial army. The Christian then might without sin hold office in a heathen state. The Bible can afford us no positive information what political power a Christian government may lawfully grant to heathens, because none such was in existence ; but we learn from history, that the Christian Emperors did not deprive their unbelieving subjects of any of their rights or privileges, and that Christians and heathens deliberated together in the Roman Senate.

You, Sir, however, have not been misled by confounding Judaism with Christianity, nor are

your conclusions drawn from the example of any of the “elders, who by faith obtained a good report.” The portion of Scripture upon which you build is confessedly obscure, and learned men have never yet agreed in its interpretation. The word of God no doubt is “*Truth*,” and the prophecies upon which you rely, being a part of that word, are *true*; but it is strange that you should not perceive that your premises are not that infallible word, but the meaning assigned to it by fallible men. You observe, that the wisest and best Christians have never hesitated in applying these prophecies to the Church of Rome; yet other divines, who are regarded as no less eminent, have arrived at a different conclusion. A moral precept or an historical fact is understood in the same sense by all, but the interpretation of such prophecies is a matter of *uncertainty*, and the ablest expounder can claim no more for his than high *probability*. If we deny the probability, the foundation is removed, and the whole superstructure falls of course. As a Protestant, claiming the right of private judgment, I am not bound to prefer the comments of Mede and Newton to those of Grotius and Hammond, or with Whitby I may plead my inability to fathom the depths of the *Apocalypse*.

Is it then pious, is it reasonable, to assert, that we are rejecting God’s *own testimony*,

when we are only rejecting uncertain human interpretations, which none can now prove to be true, and which time may prove to be false? But supposing that I allow your premises, why am I bound to acquiesce in your conclusions, since one of your own interpreters has taught me to draw a different lesson from the Bible? Secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but those that are revealed, unto us and our children to do them. To do justice, to shew mercy, to overcome evil with good, are Christian duties which are plainly revealed. Let us practise these, and fear not that we shall interfere with the secret will of the Almighty. I have as high a value as you can have for Mr. Davison's admirable work upon Prophecy, but it is his "Considerations on the Piety or Religious Principle of Conciliatory Measures towards Ireland" that we must consult for his opinion upon our duty with respect to our Roman Catholic fellow-subjects. The Apocalyptic voice, "Come out of her, my people," sounds in his ears not as a command to exclude the members of the corrupt Church from offices, and to keep them in all secular things under the yoke, but as a command to cast off her unscriptural doctrines, her arts of craft, cruelties, and oppressions, and to renounce all *religious communion* with her; and he shews, that "the mark of the beast" is not going to be set upon this Chris-

tian land, which exhibits a pure faith and worship in its own Apostolical Church, which is not about to adopt a single doctrine or practice from that of Rome, or to give up a single one of its own.

You have persuaded yourself, that the Man of Sin, the Woman that is drunk with the blood of the Saints, Babylon the great the Mother of harlots and abominations of the earth, are personifications of the Church of Rome, and from this persuasion you infer, that it is the "*will of God*" that you should regard that Church as the object of his peculiar abhorrence. I will not say that your persuasion is erroneous, and I will cordially join with you in abhorring the many doctrinal corruptions that have been sanctioned by Papal Rome, and the intolerant, arrogant, and domineering spirit that in the dark ages characterized her clergy. A long and almost universal empire gave it full scope for its developement; and when the world grew weary of the yoke, and some nations had succeeded in throwing it off, they endeavoured to rivet the chain with craft and cruelty. That spirit must be odious in the sight of the supreme Head of the Church, who "came not to be ministered to but to minister," and who commanded his followers to be meek and lowly, to call no one Master upon earth, and to love each other as brethren;" but that spirit un-

happily is not peculiar to Rome ; it is indeed the natural growth of the corrupt human heart, and I dread the slightest indication of its existence in any denomination of Christians. I could never become a member of a community which divides the honour due to God alone with his creatures ; but I recollect, that though Rome has raised up a superstructure of “hay and stubble,” she has built it upon the “true *foundation*,” and that though she may be accused of “worshipping angels,” she still “holds the head ;” and corrupt as she is, I consider her with our most approved divines to be a true Church. I am aware that many call her idolatrous, and they refer to the declaration to that effect required from Members of Parliament ; but though I grant that *my* adoration of the consecrated wafer would be idolatrous, I regard it as no more than reasonable and proper respect in those who believe that it hath been transubstantiated into the glorified body of the Redeemer. The hasty reader, when he finds them called *idolaters*, is led to degrade them to the level of the *heathen*, and to apply to them the texts that were written of persons who worshipped idols *instead* of the true God ; and many who would refuse admission into civil offices to idolaters properly so called, might grant them to those who, after all that can be laid to their charge, believe

in the same Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, as themselves ; yet such is the force of a name, that chiefly upon this account they would exclude them, while they have never been shocked at the admission of those who think they need neither redemption nor sanctification, who deny the divinity of our Lord, and “ count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing.”

Your second conclusion naturally follows from the first ; but I cannot bring myself to designate as the enemy of Christ a communion, which retains, though in part concealed and in part perverted by the traditions of men, the essential doctrines of our common faith ; which her missionaries introduced into our country as well as into the greater number of the European states. Even when most alloyed with superstition, I have no doubt that their doctrine proved to many “ the power of God unto salvation ;” and as in process of time the truth has been sifted out and retained, while human inventions have been rejected by our own and other Protestant Churches, why may we not, instead of indulging in gloomy forebodings, look forward with hope to the extension of the Reformation in Ireland, where it seems to have been at length begun, if we deprive the Papists there of all grounds of complaint, and contend against their faith with no other weapons than arguments ? The least

approach towards persecution is Anti-christian ; but I would rather refer to the Woman drunk with the blood of the saints as a warning than as a reproach. Few Churches that have had the power of punishing presumed heretics have not sinned in this respect, if not so deeply as the Roman, yet with less excuse, because they ought to have allowed to others the liberty which they claimed for themselves. Yet toleration, now universally approved, was till the time of Cromwell unpractised, and universally reprobated.

You recommend the use of every means not forbidden by God's word to hinder the increase of Popery, and I would willingly employ all means permitted by that word to convince its members of their errors ; but I cannot bring myself to believe, that even the negative persecution of restrictions and disabilities are justifiable means of maintaining truth or repressing error. "The breath of the Saviour's mouth which is to consume the Man of Sin" whoever he may be, "the sharp sword of his mouth with which our triumphant Lord is to smite the nations," is no material weapon, but pure, unmixed Gospel truth, which "none of its adversaries shall be able to gainsay or resist."

You will perceive from this statement, that though my opinion of the Roman Catholic religion is not quite so unfavourable as your own,

I also think it wrong to encourage it, notwithstanding I cannot assent to your conclusion, that we are about to commit a national *sin*, the reason is, that an obvious fallacy pervades your appeal, and many writings on the same side, *the confounding the admission of our Roman Catholic fellow-subjects into civil offices with a national recognition of the truth of their religion*. The payment of their clergy by the State might be regarded in that light, and I am astonished that those who have religious scruples against the Relief Bill have never petitioned against the annual parliamentary grant to Maynooth College. The present Bill may indirectly, contrary to the design of the Legislature, promote the Roman Catholic religion, but the grant is a direct and open encouragement. The Bill only interferes with the religion to check and restrain it; it confers upon the monastic orders no legal existence, it prohibits the entrance of Jesuits into the United Kingdom, and forbids their prelates to retain the titles of their sees; and in granting Roman Catholics civil privileges, it requires them upon oath to acknowledge the legal right of our clergy to Church property, and the Protestant character of the State. They will be admitted into offices and into Parliament not *because* but *notwithstanding* they are Roman Catholics; and they have been hitherto excluded not because

their religion is deemed erroneous, but because it was supposed that their acknowledgment of a foreign Bishop as head of the Church was incompatible with allegiance to their sovereign. If religion had been the reason, their exclusion would have been dated from the settlement of our Church; whereas it is well known, that it was one of the results of a national panic above a century after. On the theory of which we now hear so much of a pure Protestant Constitution, the Officers of State and Members of the Parliament should be required to assent and consent to the Articles of the Established Church, or at least, to some Protestant confession of faith; but the test is not positive but negative; it is only directed against Popery; and whoever will take it, may profess any creed however absurd or mischievous, or even no creed whatever. There is nothing that excludes an unbeliever.

The question now before Parliament is a political one, and religion is no further concerned in it, than it is in all great questions either of public or private life. The right of the Roman Catholic to the free exercise of his religion is not denied, and in a free country it ought not to deprive him of any civil or political office, until it can be shewn that there is any tenet of his faith that renders him incapable of discharging the duties of it, or that his principles require him to pervert

his power and influence to the injury of others. The proof of his unfitness is fairly thrown upon the objecter. This however is resolving the question into one of *expediency*; those who would exclude Roman Catholics upon *principle* must be prepared to exclude them for ever, with an heroic disdain of consequences, though it should be proved that no injury would arise from their admission, and that national ruin would be the effect of their exclusion.

A government is justified in not tolerating doctrines positively and plainly repugnant to morality: no one could reasonably complain of a prohibition of human sacrifices, no one ought to call a refusal to permit widows in India to burn themselves with their deceased husbands persecution; but it cannot be a *sin* to grant political power, not to a false religion, but to the *members* of *any* religion which a nation is justified in tolerating. If it be a sin to admit Roman Catholics to command our armies, to preside in our courts of justice, and to deliberate in the great council of the nation, because it seems to countenance their religion, is it not a greater one to tolerate the public celebration of their worship, and to suffer their priests to proclaim from the pulpit that their Church is the only true one, out of which there can be no salvation? If my conscience forbad my granting the first, I should be

under the necessity of withholding the second ; but surely if this be a legitimate conclusion, the premises cannot be true.

Some will say, that it is a *sin* to admit them into places where they may have the power of endangering our pure and reformed Church. Its purity I consider to be its security, the only one it hath a right to claim, and the only one that it needs. Its revenues were originally the property of the State, and belong to it only as an *establishment*. I deny not the right of the State to establish the Church, nor the wisdom or piety of that proceeding ; but I cannot forget that the *Church* is an independent society, neither of this world nor designed to answer worldly ends, whose “citizenship is in heaven.” It can exist, for it has existed, and flourished too without the patronage of the temporal power, and sometimes without its protection. An alteration in its *doctrine* or *discipline* might endanger it, for it would affect its *nature*, and might destroy its *character* ; yet even this has been done, and may be done again by the proper authorities. The loss of honour and emoluments, to suppose an extreme case, would affect it only as an *establishment*. To expose it to this risk might be a political *fault*, but it would not be a *sin*, for at the worst it would only expose it to the risk of losing what is no part of itself, what is not

essential to its existence, what was originally the gift of the State. Now supposing that the Relief Bill might endanger the revenues of our Church, cannot Parliament devise some means of protecting, or as heretofore of enlarging, them? but into this subject I shall not enter, for I have undertaken to advocate not the *expediency* but the *lawfulness* of the measure; to justify not the wisdom of our Senators in granting it, but their right to do so as Christians. My opinion, however, is, that the Church will be far from being endangered, that she will be strengthened by an act, which whether we regard it as an act of justice or of generosity, has a natural tendency to remove jealousies and discontent, to soften prejudices, to excite gratitude. An opponent is exasperated by what he considers severe and unjust treatment, the contrary conduct is likely to make him a friend. I approve therefore of the Bill as one of universal relief; for while it relieves the Roman Catholic from his grievances, it relieves our Church from the imputation of owing her ascendancy to the oppression of a rival. She has lately shewn that she retains no jealousy of Protestant dissenters; it is time to convince the world that she does not fear the Church from which she has seceded. I regard the act as worthy of a Christian Legislature, since it shews at once good will towards our

Christian brethren, though of another communion, and trust in God "as able to maintain his own cause;" as such therefore I hail it as a boon with delight and thankfulness; and while you and others are apprehensive of the divine displeasure, I feel confident that it will bring down a blessing upon our Church and upon our country..

My delight would be complete, and without alloy, were it not for the decided opposition of so many of the Clergy; but they, I hope, will like you find consolation in the conviction, that however threatening the danger may seem to be, God is able to maintain his own cause, and that the gates of hell shall never prevail against the Church of Christ; and I would beg leave respectfully to recommend them to follow your hints, which though excellent at all times, are now peculiarly seasonable. You observe, that the main apostacy of the Papacy in the eyes of our reformers consisted in departing from the doctrine of justification by faith alone, the criterion, as Luther considered it, of a flourishing or falling Church; and the comparative neglect of it since their days hath checked both at home and abroad the progress of Protestantism, and enabled Romanism to keep the ground she occupies, and in some degree to recover her ancient strength. If all the Clergy who are alarmed at the anticipated triumph of Popery were to oppose it by refuting its

unscriptural tenets, and by preaching the genuine truths of Christianity, such a legitimate spiritual warfare could be condemned by none ; it would be respected by adversaries, it would be admired by friends, it would be mighty, as of old, to the “pulling down of strong holds, to casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”

That all the kingdoms of this world, not only heathen ones but those that profess the faith, may become in reality as well as in name the kingdoms of Christ, is my prayer, as doubtless it is yours and theirs ; but till that time arrive, when we shall need to exercise no charity or forbearance, because we shall be all of “one heart and of one soul,” while we are growing up “to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,” let us, since we cannot yet unite with all in worship, unite in the business of life ; and study till we attain to unity of faith, to keep “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

I am, Dear Sir, with respect,
Your sincere and faithful friend,
A RESIDENT MEMBER OF THE
UNIVERSITY.

Oxford, April 3, 1829.

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